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Dimensions of Political News Cultures: Sound Bite and Image Bite News in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States

Frank Esser

This study offers the first systematic analysis of sound bites and image bites across countries and across time. It goes beyond traditional sound bite research by extending the scope of analysis also to visuals and by analyzing both sound and image bites not only with regard to their length but also with regard to their content and editorial packaging. Based on these findings, contours of three different political news cultures emerge: a strongly interventionist U.S. American approach, a moderately interventionist Anglo-German approach, and a noninterventionist French approach. Adopting an explicitly cross-national comparative perspective, the study introduces a theoretical model that explains sound bite news in divergent media systems and links it to the concept of media culture. It derives seven hypotheses from the model and tests them on three levels of analysis—organizational, national, and transnational. Despite a growing transnational convergence, multivariate data analysis shows evidence of the enduring importance that national parameters continue to exert. Conclusions for comparative political communication research are drawn.

Keywords: *comparative research; election campaign; journalism; news reporting; press systems; television news*

News culture is an important concept for comparative communication research. It differs from research into media systems or journalistic cultures in that it does not focus the attention on institutional arrangements or attitudinal profiles but on content features. This study aims to demonstrate how a cross-national analysis of sound and image bites can serve as a meaningful example for characterizing different political news cultures. The starting point is the United States, where the average sound bite—meaning a block of uninterrupted speech by a candidate on television news—shrank from forty-two seconds in 1968 to about eight seconds in 2004 (Farnsworth and Lichter 2007).

Patterson concluded that the United States has reached the point of “voiceless candidates” because they have been given fewer and fewer chances to speak for themselves; in fact, candidates are said to have been “squeezed out” of election coverage (Patterson 1993: 74–75).

This study argues that this development, although significant, may not be the whole story. First, it seems useful to broaden the distinctly American perspective in this line of research and inquire to what extent sound bite news is an element of western news culture in general. Second, it appears useful to re-evaluate the role of pure “voiceless” image bites and to analyze them as separate entities. Third, it seems necessary to clearly identify the theoretical concepts and explanatory factors behind sound bite news that are at play in different media systems. The fourth innovation of this study is a comprehensive correspondence analysis that—on the basis of all relevant variables—discerns three distinct political news cultures: a strongly interventionist (U.S. American), a moderately interventionist (Anglo-German), and a noninterventionist (French) one.

Sound Bites and Image Bites

This study follows Hallin’s (1992) definition of sound bites as film segments within a news story that show someone speak without interruption. In the literature, shrinking candidate sound bites are usually seen as an indicator of an increasingly media-centered reporting style in which the initiator of election narratives is the journalist, not the candidate. From this perspective, shrinking candidate sound bites refer to a reporting style that emphasizes the role of the journalist who summarizes, contextualizes, and evaluates politicians’ messages—and who basically does the speaking for the candidates (Farnsworth and Lichter 2007). As a result, much of what voters hear about the candidates is rarely from the candidates themselves. This, it is assumed, undermines the authenticity of electoral coverage (Patterson 1993) and makes it more difficult for viewers to fully make sense of a candidate’s policies (Donsbach and Jandura 2003).

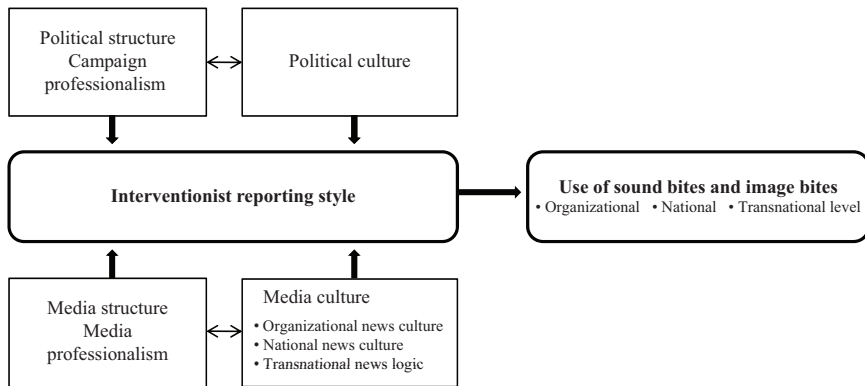
But audio is not the only information channel on television. Although many sound bite researchers have called for a greater analysis of visuals, hitherto, not many scholars have taken up this call. Bucy and Grabe (2007) are an important exception in this respect, and their work inspired us to study image bites more systematically across different political and journalistic cultures. Our definition of image bites as film segments within a news story in which someone is shown but not heard follows the early conceptualization of Steele and Barnhurst (1996; Barnhurst and Steele 1997). Research on information processing theory has shown that the human brain prefers processing visual over verbal information. As Bucy and Grabe (2007) rightfully pointed out, visual experience is the dominant mode of learning. TV viewers recall visuals better

than verbal information, and TV viewers base their evaluations of people more readily on what they see rather than on what they hear. Against this background, it is surprising that image bites have not been examined more extensively in the past.

Explaining Sound Bites and Image Bites from a Comparative Perspective

From a comparative perspective, how can the use of sound bites and image bites be explained theoretically? Scholars such as Hallin (1992), Patterson (1993), Steele and Barnhurst (1996), Donsbach and Jandura (2003), Farnsworth and Lichter (2007), and Vos (2008) argue that the more journalist-centered, faster paced, and enhanced visual style of news has more than just aesthetic implications. They interpret it as a professionally motivated behavior by journalists to increase their influence, authority, and prestige—and ultimately, their control over the news. In theoretical terms, this refers to the “media’s discretionary power” or “journalistic intervention” (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995, 2001; Semetko et al. 1991). The journalistic attitude toward intervention in election campaigns is high when journalists report the campaign in their own words, scenarios, assessments—and when they grant politicians only limited opportunities to present themselves with sound bites and image bites in the news. High interventionism is found in a journalistic culture that Semetko et al. (1991; see also Blumler and Gurevitch 1995) labeled “pragmatic” as opposed to “sacerdotal.” Whereas a sacerdotal approach considers political statements and activities as intrinsically important and as something that deserves to be reported authentically and extensively, a pragmatic approach insists that political material should fight its way into news programs on its news value only and in consideration of the newsworthiness of competing stories. In a pragmatic news culture, candidates’ statements are likely to be used to a lesser extent and more often as raw material in the construction of the reporter’s own story.

Research into news cultures has made headway in recent years. Two other journalistic orientations have been found to be closely related to interventionist attitudes: the first is proximity versus distance to power holders, and the second is market logic versus public service logic (see Pfetsch 2004; Hanitzsch 2007). Journalists with great distance to power holders tend to be very skeptical of assertions made by politicians, whereas journalists with close proximity to authorities tend to be more defensive of them, more loyal to their interests, and more receptive to their statements (and thus, less interventionist). Journalists in a market-oriented culture produce news primarily to achieve commercial goals, whereas journalists in a public interest-oriented culture tend to regard their audience as citizens rather than consumers and produce news more with respect to the democratic needs of society (and thus,

**Figure 1**

Factors Influencing Journalistic Intervention in Different National Contexts

less interventionist). These insights from Pfetsch's (2004) and Hanitzsch's (2007) works on culture enrich our understanding of the role and relation of interventionism and allow us to develop more complex hypotheses and more context-sensitive explanations when looking at different countries.

From a comparative perspective, we expect substantial cross-national variation in journalistic attitudes with regard to the notion that the media may play an active and independent role in shaping the coverage of election campaigns. According to Blumler and Gurevitch (2001), the degree of media intervention is affected by the political setting and the media setting of the respective country.

Figure 1 offers a graphic illustration of the relevant factors (drawn from Blumler and Gurevitch 2001 and Semetko et al. 1991) that vary across national political communication systems and help predict the extent of the news media's discretionary power in using sound bites and image bites. With regard to independent variables, the model expects journalistic attitudes that favor more frequent interventions in campaign news to flourish in a

political culture in which public opinion is more cynical and distrustful of political institutions because it creates a climate in which adversarial journalism seems socially acceptable;

media culture that is leaning toward a more pragmatic approach (guided by strict news values and a general skepticism toward statements made by those in power) than to a sacerdotal approach (regarding the reportage of political news and positions as an inherently important service to democracy that must be provided as of right);

highly professionalized journalistic community that has achieved a status of independence from outside interference (especially from political control), the development

of autonomous and distinctively journalistic criteria that guide the production of news, and the evolution of proactive, party-distant role perceptions such as interpreter, critic, watchdog, or entertainer;
 highly *professionalized election campaign* characterized by a strong focus on news management, message control, and restricted media access;
political structure with weak party organizations, weak party loyalties in the electorate, and weak influence of party ideologies on social life; or
media structure that is subject to only very light state regulation and in which broadcasters are less guided by public service obligations but more by commercial considerations, profit orientations, and competitive market pressures.

With regard to dependent variables, the model expects that a high level of journalistic intervention will lead to

shorter candidate sound bites but longer journalist sound bites,
 candidate sound bites with less policy content but attack-related and campaign buzz-related content,
 image bites that portray candidates in a less authoritative light and show journalists in more potent light, and
 a smaller amount of election news coverage in general.

By contrast, in settings with low levels of journalistic intervention, we expect to observe the opposite tendencies. An important new twist to this study is that it analyzes both sound and image bites also for their content and editorial packaging. To measure the subject matter of sound bites, we adapted the "content" category from Bucy and Grabe (2007), and to measure the content of image bites, we drew on "facial display" categories from Bucy and Bradley (2004) and Kepplinger (1987, 1999). The packaging of image bites was analyzed by adapting Kepplinger's (1987) "selection bias" category, Grabe's (2007) "lip flap" category, and Hallin's (1992) "wrap up" category. The special emphasis on visuals marks a renunciation of the traditional view that the length of bites in which politicians are seen speaking captures their entire meaningful presence in a news story. Bucy and Grabe (2007) disagree and argue that even a merely visual appearance can also convey meaningful information (about aspects that remain unspoken but may be of value to voters in assessing a candidate) and should not be disregarded by political communication researchers. We expect the use of candidates' image bites in news programs to be extensive, and increasing, because visuals allow for more personalized, captivating, and entertaining reports (Bucy and Grabe 2007; Steele and Barnhurst 1996). The use of powerful images also allows journalists to impose a specific tone in their reports: Discrediting pictures may reflect a skeptical attack-dog attitude toward politicians, whereas flattering pictures may reflect a more sacerdotal lapdog or guard-dog attitude (Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien 1995).

Organizational Culture, National Culture, or Transnational News Culture?

Hanitzsch (2007) sees interventionism, power distance, and market orientation as forming a common attitudinal dimension of journalism culture. He conceptualized culture as a shared occupational ideology that expresses itself in three ways: ideas (journalistic attitudes, worldviews, and role perceptions), practices (reporting methods and routines of news production), and artifacts (media products, news stories). Whereas research into "journalistic culture" is usually survey-based and focuses on ideas and their relevance for practices, research into "news culture" is content-based and concentrates on the manifestations of these ideas and practices in artifacts. We consider sound and image bites as prototypical features of television news cultures and aim to identify the systematic patterns that guide their use and can be seen as symbolic expressions of the underlying journalistic culture.¹

To explain news content from a comparative perspective, three levels of analysis must be examined: national, organizational, and transnational (Reese 2001; see also Figure 1). On the national level, the media system typology of Hallin and Mancini (2004) leads us to classify the United States as a national news culture whose contextual setting favors the largest degree of journalistic intervention (for an elaborate argument, see Blumler and Gurevitch 2001; Semetko et al. 1991; Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2006). At the other extreme of the spectrum is France, a prototype of the polarized pluralist model of media-politics relations, where we expect the least inclination to journalistic intervention (for an instructive comparison of the media systems of the United States, France, Germany, and Britain, see Hallin and Mancini 2004). France's long history of government-controlled broadcasting hindered the development of a strong and independent journalistic culture, and up to this day, "breeds connivance between journalists and politicians" (Chalaby 2005: 287). Despite a recent decline in journalistic deference, "the mass of French journalists remain significantly less adversarial and less autonomous in their relationship with elite politicians than their Anglo-American counterparts" (Kuhn 2005a: 319). In both the 2002 and 2007 elections, the French media tended to follow the campaign themes set by the leading candidates rather than set the agenda themselves (Kuhn 2005b, 2007). Germany and Great Britain take middle positions. Their broadcast systems are both typical of the democratic-corporatist model of media-politics relations.² Germany and Great Britain are characterized by stronger party organizations and party-centered political negotiation processes than the United States, which leads us to assume a smaller power distance (and more consensual symbiosis) between the news media and politicians (Pfetsch 2004; Esser and D'Angelo 2006). Yet, journalistic attitudes toward intervention are expected to be more pronounced than in France because of less government

interference in broadcasting and stronger professional autonomy of the journalistic community (Hallin and Mancini 2004). In sum, this “nations matter” argument lets us expect considerable differences between national news cultures with regard to journalistic intervention. Methodologically, it requires a country sample that reflects the divergent broadcast systems.

Yet, there can be considerable variation within news cultures. Therefore, our second level of analysis looks at the different organizational cultures in public and commercial broadcasting newsrooms (Harrison 2000; Holtz-Bacha and Norris 2001; Kueng-Shankleman 2000). Public service television, of which the BBC is the oldest and most influential role model, is the birthplace of a sacerdotal news culture and committed to principles of plurality, impartiality, program quality, social responsibility, and in-depth reporting. Recent competition from commercial competitors has doubtlessly led some European public broadcasters to dilute their commitment to an informed citizenry somewhat in favor of a more audience-oriented, depoliticized reporting style. On the other hand, some European commercial channels picked up patterns from public service channels to meet traditionally rooted audience expectations. In general, however, commercial channels can be expected to follow a distinctly different, more ratings- and profit-oriented approach, which favors a more dramatic, attention-grabbing reporting style that requires less effort and investment on the part of the producers as well as the recipients. In this news-you-can-use environment, extensive political debate is often considered a turnoff. In sum, this “organizations matter” argument expects, especially within the European countries, substantial differences between newsroom cultures of commercial and public broadcasters. Methodologically, it requires a sample that contains both types of broadcasters.

Our third level of analysis refers to transnational influences and expects a growing convergence of western TV cultures over time. Western countries and their broadcast systems are increasingly affected by similar technological innovations, secularization processes, commercial pressures, and increasing competition for people’s attention (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 251–73). In addition, the growing diffusion of common practices in journalism training may also have contributed to the consolidation of news standards in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States. Other factors, such as growing interaction of western journalists through covering the same events and using the same agencies and media outlets (WTN, CNN, *Herald Tribune*, *Financial Times*), may also have supported a transnational convergence of journalistic techniques, practices, and values over the years (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Reese 2001; Swanson 2004). In sum, this “diffusion matters” argument expects western broadcasters to form an increasingly narrow and homogeneous cluster. Methodologically, it focuses the attention to western cases and a longitudinal design.

Hypotheses

Based on the assumptions that could be derived from our model and our three levels of analysis, we formulated seven hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The total amount of TV election news coverage is lowest on the commercial channels in the United States and highest on the public service channels in Europe.

Hypothesis 2a: The average length of candidate sound bites is shorter in the United States than in the European countries (because of a more cynical political culture, a more skeptical media culture, a more commercial media structure, and a less party-dominated political structure).

Hypothesis 2b: Within Europe, candidate sound bites on public service channels are longer than on the commercial channels (because of public interest requirements to serve the needs of the political system by providing information-rich and balanced candidate information).

Hypothesis 3a: The cumulative speaking time of journalists outweighs cumulative speaking time of candidates to a greater extent in the United States than in the European countries (because of a more pragmatic national news culture that is guided by strict news values and a general skepticism toward statements made by those in power).

Hypothesis 3b: In Europe, cumulative speaking time of journalists outweighs that of candidates to a greater extent on profit-oriented commercial channels (because market-driven journalism tends to be “news lite” or even “antipolitics”).

Hypothesis 4: Content of candidate sound bites is oriented more toward issue substance on European news, especially on public service channels, than on U.S. news. In the more commercial and adversarial U.S. culture, content of candidate sound bites is expected to be characterized more by attack rhetoric and campaign rhetoric.

Hypothesis 5: The average length of candidate sound bites is shorter in election campaigns that are tightly scripted and carefully staged (indicating a correlation between high levels of news management and high levels of journalistic resistance and intervention).

Hypothesis 6a: The candidates’ pure image bites account for a substantial part of election stories, at least equaling the duration of candidate sound bites per story (because they answer a transnational need to deliver more attention-grabbing reports).

Hypothesis 6b: It is further stipulated that the use of image bites has grown in western nations over time and is favored more on commercial than public service channels.

Hypothesis 7: Image bites are selected, edited, and packaged in ways that are more disadvantageous to candidates in the United States (because of a more cynical political culture, a more skeptical media culture, a more commercial media structure, and a less party-dominated political structure) than in Europe.

Method

To test the seven hypotheses, we conducted a content analysis of all election-related stories in the last four weeks before polling day on the flagship evening news bulletins of U.S.–American, British, German, and French TV channels over two periods of time: the first period stretching from 2000 to 2002, the second from 2004 to 2007. In the United States, we content-analyzed *ABC World News Tonight* and *NBC Nightly News*; in Great Britain, the ten o'clock news on BBC1 and ITV1; in Germany, *ARD Tagesthemen* and *RTL Aktuell*; and in France (where, unfortunately, only the 2007 data were available), the eight o'clock news on TF1 and France 2. All broadcasts follow similar formats, are anchored by prominent journalists, and provide a net news time between thirty minutes on the license fee–financed public service broadcasting stations of ARD, BBC1, and F2 and twenty-two minutes on the privately owned, advertising-financed stations of ABC, NBC, ITV1, RTL, and TF1.

First, all news shows were tape-recorded in their entirety.³ Then all those items, however brief, that were labeled or framed as general election stories were copied onto separate compilation tapes. In operational terms, the universe of this study consists of all stories that contained a clear verbal or visual reference to the upcoming general election—usually, but not always, in the form of a background logo or an anchor remark. Some of these stories did not mention the candidates at all, and others offered lengthy sit-down interviews with them. It is noteworthy that most American sound bite studies exclude interview stories a priori from their samples (e.g., Hallin 1992; Farnsworth and Lichter 2007), which leads them to report shorter sound bite lengths for U.S. candidates than our analysis does (see findings for Hypothesis 2). Yet, from our theoretical standpoint, it would be unfair, and in fact, a severe case of selection bias to ban all those stories from the analysis in which journalists try to respond to scholarly criticism by actively inviting candidates to participate in the news discourse in a more lengthy manner.

Specially trained teams of international coders were broken up into pairs of two and then assigned to stories depending on their language skills and country familiarity. Using Kerbel, Apee, and Ross's (2000) coding procedure as a guideline, each story was thus examined by two coders simultaneously. Agreement was required of both; discrepancies were resolved through discussion. If, despite repeated viewing, no agreement could be reached on a specific category, that variable was not coded. All teams were coached by the author until blind tests showed individual intercoder agreement was above 90 percent for all relevant categories. Most categories required only simple stop-watch measurements.

The official campaign periods in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and France differ substantially in length.⁴ The only way to construct strictly equivalent samples for all campaigns in all countries was to analyze all

Table 1

Cross-national and cross-temporal content analysis of leading news programs during last four weeks of campaigning

	United States 2000		Great Britain 2001		Germany 2002		France 2002	
	ABC	NBC	BBC1 [#]	ITV1	ARD [#]	RTL		
Number of election stories	75	56	147	87	54	30	Not coded	
Mean story length (sec)	118	138	138	114	178	107		
Cumulative story length (min)	148	118	338	165	161	53		
Total length of election news (min)	266		503		214			

	United States 2004		Great Britain 2005		Germany 2005		France 2007	
	ABC	NBC	BBC1 [#]	ITV1	ARD [#]	RTL	TF1	F2 [#]
Number of election stories	120	94	141	171	59	36	103	135
Mean story length (sec)	99	126	149	122	137	103	113	113
Cumulative story length (min)	199	197	351	344	132	62	193	255
Total length of election news (min)	396		695		194		448	

Note: $N = 1,308$ stories from *ABC World News*, *NBC Nightly News*, *BBC News at 10*, *ITV News at 10:30*, *ARD Tagesthemen*, *RTL Aktuell*, *TF1 Journal*, and *F2 Journal* that made clear reference to the ongoing national campaign. Every election story that aired on these programs during the last twenty workdays before polling day was coded. Weekend newscasts were excluded. # indicates license fee–financed public service broadcaster.

election-related stories that aired in the last twenty workdays before polling day. This yielded a total number of 1,308 stories on the above-mentioned stations, with an overall length of 2,716 minutes or 45.3 program hours that were eventually coded and form the empirical basis of this study (see Table 1). Coding of the 2000–2002 period was already completed when we learned of the study of Bucy and Grabe (2007), which inspired us to include several of their categories for the second wave, 2004–2007. There remain, however, conceptual differences between our studies, particularly with respect to sampling periods, sampling structure, and operational definitions.⁵

Results

Hypothesis 1: News Hole Size

The first hypothesis predicted the total amount of election coverage to be lowest in the United States. This was not confirmed, because the smallest

Table 2

Sound bites: Average length of candidates' on-air statements on leading news programs in the last four weeks of campaign

	United States 2000	Great Britain 2001	Germany 2002	France 2002	Cross-national Average
Main candidates (<i>n</i> of sound bites)	Bush, Gore, Nader, Buchanan (<i>n</i> = 215)	Blair, Hague, Kennedy (<i>n</i> = 312)	Schroeder, Stoiber, Westerwelle, Fischer (<i>n</i> = 125)	Not coded	
Average length of candidates' individual sound bites (sec)	10.6	12.5	12.6		11.9
Average length of candidate sound bites by channel (sec)	ABC 8.8 NBC 12.7	BBC1 [#] 12.3 ITV1 10.3	ARD [#] 15.3 RTL 9.3		11.5
	United States 2004	Great Britain 2005	Germany 2005	France 2007	
Main candidates (<i>n</i> of sound bites)	Bush, Kerry, Nader (<i>n</i> = 301)	Blair, Howard, Kennedy (<i>n</i> = 306)	Schroeder, Merkel, Westerwelle, Fischer (<i>n</i> = 103)	Sarkozy, Royal, Bayrou, LePen (<i>n</i> = 216)	
Average length of candidates' individual sound bites (sec)	8.8	16.9	11.2	11.9	12.2
Average length of candidate sound bites by channel (sec)	ABC 9.5 NBC 7.9	BBC1 [#] 16.8 ITV1 17.0	ARD [#] 10.8 RTL 11.9	TF1 10.9 F2 [#] 12.6	12.2

Note: *N* = 1,590 candidate sound bites from 1,308 election stories. Some of the stories in the sample had lengthy candidate interviews, others no candidate appearances at all. # indicates license fee-financed public service broadcaster.

amount occurs on German newscasts (214 minutes in 2002 and 194 minutes in 2005; see Table 1). This can be explained by two special characteristics of German TV news culture: first by an “outsourcing” of election reporting to specialized programs apart from regular news shows, and second, by a “paternalistic stance” of German news editors to sort out the “truly newsworthy” from the “same old thing.” A comparative study by Semetko (1996) found similar features already back in the early 1990s.

In Britain, the traditionally high levels of coverage increased even further (from 503 minutes in 2001 to 695 minutes in 2005) after criticism that broadcasters had been trivializing politics in the past. ITV1 made a deliberate move in 2005 to expand its election coverage by conducting exceptionally lengthy interviews with the three main party leaders in their main news bulletins (Deacon, Wring, and Golding 2006). For the BBC, public service is still a strong guiding principle that pressures its commercial competitor to absorb some of these values as well. This brings us to the second part of Hypothesis 1, which predicted more extensive coverage on public than commercial channels. This is confirmed in all European countries (the BBC higher than ITV, ARD higher than RTL, and F2 higher than TF1 across both election cycles). In sum, we noticed strong influences by newsroom cultures and by national traditions.

Hypothesis 2: Sound Bite Length

The second hypothesis (Hypothesis 2a) expected the average length of candidate sound bites to be shorter in the United States than in the European countries. This was clearly confirmed and speaks in favor of different national news cultures (Table 2). Including interview stories, we recorded an average length of candidate sound bites of 10.6 seconds in 2000 and 8.8 seconds in 2004 on U.S. network news.⁶ However, the data from the European countries do show indications of a growing similarity with the United States. Other studies from Germany (Schulz and Zeh 2007) and Britain (Deacon, Wring, and Golding 2006) have also documented a clear downward development in the length of candidates’ on-air statements since the early 1990s. Only repeated future replications will tell whether these findings are indeed part of a convergence process toward shorter sound snippets, faster paced cuts, and tightly packaged news stories. The notable increase in the 2005 British election may turn out to be an exception from an otherwise dominant transnational rule.⁷

The second hypothesis (Hypothesis 2b) also predicted that on public service channels, sound bites would be longer than on commercial channels. This was confirmed for the first but not the second period under investigation. In 2001–2002, the public channels of BBC1 and ARD granted significantly longer candidate sound bites than their commercial competitors ITV1 and RTL. Four years later, the gap between public and commercial channels had narrowed

noticeably—and it also did so in France (see Table 2 for details). This is an indication that newsroom cultures are slowly losing their explanatory power with regard to accounting for the variance of sound bite news across countries. In sum, the distinctions between national cultures and newsroom cultures, though still present, appear to be slowly evaporating.

Hypothesis 3: Dominant Voice

Because a news story can contain several candidate statements (or none), it is not sufficient to look at individual sound bites only. To fully assess the extent to which journalists control the airwaves at the expense of candidates, it is also necessary to compare the cumulative speaking time of candidates to the cumulative speaking time of journalists. The third hypothesis, which expected reporters' narration to outweigh that of candidates to a greater extent on commercial channels, especially those of the United States, was disconfirmed. Contrary to Hypothesis 3a, journalists' verbal presence was not greatest in the United States (where it ranged between 27.4 and 42.9 seconds across the two election cycles) but in Britain (34.1 to 56.0 seconds) and Germany (36.6 to 71.6 seconds; see Table 3). In fact, and contrary to Hypothesis 3b, journalists' verbal presence was greatest on the public service channels. The reason for this is that BBC1 and ARD offered lengthy interpretative pieces—either in the form of analysis and examination (in the case of BBC1's *News at 10*) or in the form of editorial commentary (e.g., in the case of *ARD Tagesthemen*).

An even better indicator of journalists' domination than their cumulative speaking time in seconds is their proportional speaking time as a percentage. With remarkable consistency—but with the telling exception of France—the time devoted to journalists' narration in election stories averages between 30 and 40 percent in all countries across all channels and all years (see data for “journalists seen speaking as percentage of average story length” in Table 3). Put differently, there is an almost universal transnational rule across Britain, Germany, and the United States that reporters' narration outweighs that of candidates by three to one. Journalists set the tone in the verbal stream of election news, not the candidates. The exception is France, where journalists' power in the delivery of political communication is less pronounced. This is in line with our expectation and seems to indicate that election news in France is structured less by an autonomous, interventionist media logic than it is in the other countries we examined.

These findings qualify a prominent claim in the existing research literature that says that “the American case is unique” with respect to forceful journalistic intervention and that “in other democracies the press is the secondary voice in election news” (Patterson 1993: 77). Not only do our results disprove this assertion, they also indicate that a more journalist-centered narrative does not

Table 3

Verbal and visual presence of candidates and journalists in average election story

	United States 2000		Great Britain 2001		Germany 2002		France 2002		Cross-national Average
	ABC	NBC	BBC1 [#]	ITV1	ARD [#]	RTL	TF1	F2 [#]	
Verbal presence:									
Candidates seen speaking in average election story (total duration in sec)	13.1	26.5 ^a	17.0	15.2	22.4 ^a	13.7			
Journalists seen speaking in average election story (total duration in sec)	36.8	42.9	43.3	34.1	71.6	41.0	Not coded		
Candidates seen speaking as percentage of average story length (%) ^b	11	19	12	13	13	13			13
Journalists seen speaking as percentage of average story length (%)	31	31	31	30	40	38			33
Visual presence:									
Candidates seen but not heard in average election story (total duration in sec)	18.4	26.3	14.4	18.3	12.5	18.6			
Candidates seen but not heard as percentage of average story length (%) ^b	16	19	10	16	7	17			14
Verbal presence:									
Candidates seen speaking in average election story (total duration in sec)	14.1	10.7	17.2	16.1	11.9	12.6	9.2	12.1	
Journalists seen speaking in average election story (total duration in sec)	27.4	36.9	56.0	46.1	49.6	36.6	22.4	25.6	
Candidates seen speaking as percentage of average story length (%) ^b	14	8	12	13	9	12	8	11	11
Journalists seen speaking as percentage of average story length (%)	28	29	38	38	36	36	20	23	31
Visual presence:									
Candidates seen but not heard in average election story (total duration in sec)	12.7	18.6	15.5	14.5	11.7	16.0	11.9	13.3	
Candidates seen but not heard as percentage of average story length (%) ^b	13	15	10	12	9	16	11	12	12

Note: N = 1,308 election stories; # indicates public service broadcaster.

a. Due to lengthy interviews with candidates.

b. The verbal and visual presence of other news sources has been omitted for simplicity of presentation.

necessarily mean more cynicism. It can—for example, in the case of BBC1—also mean more in-depth reports to prepare citizens for better informed voting decisions and a more meaningful participation in the political process. In fact, the so-called Birt revolution at the BBC called on journalists to provide more explanation and analysis in their reports (Harrison 2000). We conclude that newsroom cultures of public broadcasters still cause differences but others than expected; the second observation is that these differences seem to be disappearing in favor of a transnational convergence of national news cultures (especially in the case of Britain, Germany, and the United States).

Hypothesis 4: Sound Bite Content

Sound bite news is influenced not only by how journalists edit their stories but also by how candidates phrase their statements. To capture the subject matter of candidates' on-air statements, we used a subset of categories suggested by Bucy and Grabe (2007) that basically distinguishes between substance, attack, defense, and campaigning.⁸ In the more confrontational and commercial setting of U.S. presidential campaigns, the content of candidate sound bites is expected to be characterized more by "attack rhetoric" and "campaign rhetoric." On the European news, by contrast, candidate statements are expected to be oriented more toward "substance," especially on the public service channels. This hypothesis is in line with Plasser's distinction of campaign styles (2002). He characterizes American campaigns as candidate centered, money driven, consultancy based, and highly professionalized, with an excessive orientation toward spin control, issue management, impression management, and permanent campaigning. Western European campaigns, by contrast, are described as more party-centered, moderately professionalized, managed by party staff, and publicly funded (Plasser 2002: 83). As a matter of fact, we found only mixed support for Hypothesis 4.

Starting with aspects that confirmed the hypothesis, "attack rhetoric" was indeed the dominant content feature of candidate sound bites in the United States (Table 4). To both, candidates on the stump and journalists in the editing suites, "attack" seemed the most appealing angle in their attempts to win their respective audiences. But—contrary to our expectations—"campaigning" only made it third place, behind a surprisingly strong showing of "substance" as the second most frequent content feature in U.S. candidate statements. Put differently, sound bites in the United States may be brief, but to say that they are therefore automatically without substance would be a mistake.⁹ A second noteworthy difference between national news cultures is the great number of cases in which British candidates found themselves in "defense" mode because of an interview style that is much more adversarial on the BBC and ITV than on other channels, particularly in comparison to France.

Table 4

Content of candidate sound bites in average election story (in percentages)

	United States 2004		Great Britain 2005		Germany 2005		France 2007		Cross-national Average
	ABC	NBC	BBC1 [#]	ITV1	ARD [#]	RTL	TF1	F2 [#]	
Substance: Issue discussions of policies or news events	25	30	28	27	21	20	27	36	27
Attack rhetoric	43	43	31	26	32	23	32	23	32
Defense rhetoric	7	5	11	23	3	3	1	2	7
Campaigning: Statements about victory, support, strategy, momentum	20	17	25	21	42	48	36	36	31
Other	5	5	4	4	2	5	5	3	4
Total duration candidates are seen speaking in average election story	100 (14.1 sec)	100 (10.7 sec)	100 (17.2 sec)	100 (16.1 sec)	100 (11.9 sec)	100 (12.6 sec)	100 (9.2 sec)	100 (12.1 sec)	

Note: *N* = 859 stories; # indicates public service broadcaster.

A third noteworthy difference on the national level is the high news value that “campaign” related candidate statements enjoy on German and French television. Despite decade-old claims that U.S. network news is predominated by horse race and campaign buzz (Patterson and McClure 1976; Farnsworth and Lichter 2007), our results show that ABC and NBC news producers selected by far the smallest share of “campaign”-related candidate statements for integration into their broadcasts.

By all measures, the French candidates appeared as the most civilized on television: They were shown uttering the largest amount of substance, the smallest amount of aggression, and never got in a position in which they had to use “defense rhetoric” to ward off rough questioning from journalists. In sum, this analysis revealed meaningful differences between national news cultures that have remained influential despite convergence processes in other areas of political communication. We also found further evidence that differences between public service channels and commercial channels seem to be vanishing.

Hypothesis 5: Sound Bite News as Fight-back

An important reason for adversarial reporting in the press is news management and media manipulation by candidates (Semetko et al. 1991; Zaller 1998). Hypothesis 5 thus expected the average length of candidate sound bites to be shorter in those election campaigns that are tightly scripted and carefully staged, indicating a stronger resistance among journalists to candidates’

attempts to control the nature of information. Our criterion for determining the degree to which a campaign is tightly scripted was inspired by John Zaller's "measure of news management," which is based on a careful content analysis of media references to campaign behaviors that denote either high or low concern for message control (for a justification of the method, see Zaller 1999). Our empirical indicator for message control was a category called news situation. We coded, for each candidate statement, whether it was made in a "fully controlled news situation," in a "partially controlled news situation," or in an "uncontrolled news situation" (a distinction developed by Bennett 2005). Fully controlled situations are pseudo-events (e.g., campaign events with screened audiences) that are planned primarily for generating positive media reports and in which the candidate controls the setting and scripting to make it difficult for reporters to find TV images or story angles other than those suggested by the campaign handlers. Partially controlled situations refer to interviews, Q & A sessions at press conferences, and other communication settings in which the degree of control over when and how the story is being told is shared between politicians and journalists. Uncontrolled or out-of-control news situations are usually the result of wrongdoings, bust-ups with critics, public embarrassments, or smear campaigns that put the candidate under heavy media pressure.

In line with our expectation, the U.S. campaigns appear as the most highly orchestrated and tightly scripted: 80 percent of all news situations in which U.S. candidates speak on television are fully controlled and prevent journalists from even getting physically near them, let alone interrogating them. Conversely, the relatively open and accessible British campaign with daily press conferences, frequent interviews, and spontaneous press avails shows candidates in 80 percent of the cases in partially controlled, interaction-based settings (see Table 5 for data and operational definitions).

Our cross-national data show a clear pattern that validates Zaller's (1998, 1999) theory of media politics. Zaller's main hypothesis is that the more strenuously politicians try to control news coverage, the more journalists will resist covering them and rather report something different that gives expression to the journalistic voice. Regression analysis in Figure 2 shows that this is precisely the case: The more tightly scripted the candidates wage their campaigns (*x*-axis, intensity of news management), the more the stations compress the candidates' on-air statements (*y*-axis, average length of sound bites). This helps us formulate another transnational rule: As political public relations becomes more professionalized, journalists become increasingly concerned about preserving their autonomy; dissecting candidates' statements can be seen as a countermeasure by journalists to re-establish control over their own product (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995: 210; Zaller 1998: 127). The relationship between assertive news management style and assertive journalistic response is mainly determined by country dynamics, not newsroom cultures

Table 5

Scripted versus unscripted campaign appearances by national candidates, as observed from media reports (in percentages)

	United States 2004		Great Britain 2005		Germany 2005		France 2007		Cross-national Average
	ABC	NBC	BBC1 [#]	ITV1	ARD [#]	RTL	TF1	F2 [#]	
Tightly scripted campaign appearances ^a	81	79	30	17	46	48	20	34	44
Partially scripted, more interactive campaign appearances ^b	18	21	70	83	54	52	80	66	56
Total duration candidates are seen speaking in average election story	100 (14.1 sec)	100 (10.7 sec)	100 (17.2 sec)	100 (16.1 sec)	100 (11.9 sec)	100 (12.6 sec)	100 (9.2 sec)	100 (12.1 sec)	

Note: *N* = 859 stories; 'uncontrolled' news situations were extremely rare; # indicates public service broadcaster.

a. Measured as percentage share of news situations on TV in which candidates speak in "fully" controlled campaign settings—disallowing direct exchanges with journalists (e.g., staged stump speeches).

b. Measured as percentage share of news situations on TV in which candidates appear in "partially" or "uncontrolled" campaign settings—allowing for direct exchanges with journalists (e.g., interviews).

(see Figure 2). This is further proof of the enduring and distinct diversity of national contexts and their power to explain the behavior of candidates and journalists.

Hypothesis 6: Prevalence of Image Bites

Television research that focuses on the verbal side and disregards the visual side is severely constrained because the visual content of candidate portrayals is a powerful source of political perceptions (Bucy and Grabe 2007; Grabe 2007; Kepplinger 1999). It is increasingly problematic to ignore image bites—that is, voiceless visuals of candidates—as their use is likely to increase because they allow for more personalized, dynamic, and attention-grabbing reports. Hypothesis 6a thus expects the use of candidates' image bites to be extensive, accounting at least for the same amount per story as candidate sound bites. The findings in Table 3 confirm this assumption when cell entries are compared for "candidates seen speaking as percentage of average story length" to "candidates seen but not heard as percentage of average story length." The cross-national averages show an even split between candidates' "verbal presence" and "visual presence" in both the 2000–2002 stories (with the ratio being 13 percent to

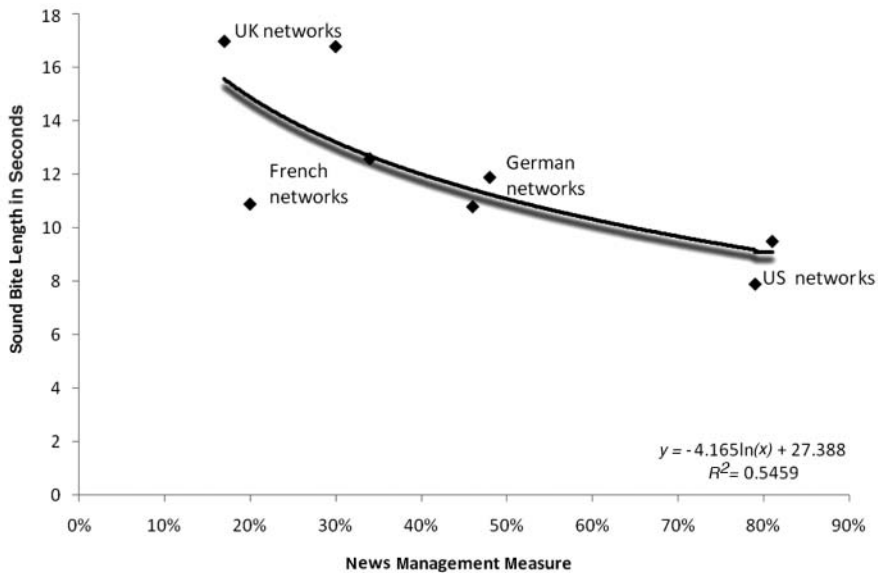


Figure 2

Relationship between Assertive News Management Style and Assertive Journalistic Response
Note: Logarithmic regression model explains 55 percent of the variance. Graph combines data from Table 5 on reports of tightly scripted campaign appearances (*x*-axis) and Table 2 on average length of candidate sound bite by channel (*y*-axis) for the elections 2004–2007.

14 percent) and the 2004–2007 stories (ratio 11 percent to 12 percent; see far right column of Table 3). As a further transnational rule, we can thus state that candidates on American, British, French, and German TV news are featured as often in image bites as they are in sound bites. This suggests that viewers receive double the amount of candidate information on TV news than is acknowledged in research that focuses on verbal information only. This is not only true for U.S. news—as shown before by Bucy and Grabe (2007)—but also across European media systems.

Our results do not demonstrate that use of image bites has grown over time (as was stipulated by Hypothesis 6b), but they do show that commercial channels make somewhat more use of them than public channels. The BBC and ARD devoted 7 to 10 percent of average story time to candidate image bites, while NBC and RTL assigned 17 to 19 percent (Table 3). We can conclude that the heavy reliance on visual-driven reporting constitutes a transnational trend in western election news coverage, but it is more pronounced on commercial than public stations.

Hypothesis 7: Content and Packaging of Image Bites

The fact that candidates appear longer on television news than previous sound bite research had established does not necessarily mean that they appear more favorable to voters. Every day, TV stations are able to choose from a variety of images for their election campaign footage, and the interesting question in this respect is which images the journalist eventually decides to select. The majority of images available are positive, as the candidates and their advisors are naturally interested in providing the audience with an attractive public appearance. Those journalists who deliberately look for unfavorable depictions, however, will always find some. In fact, our last hypothesis expected image bites in U.S. news programs to be selected and packaged in ways that are more disadvantageous to candidates compared to news programs in other countries. The background of this assumption is Patterson's (1993) assertion that U.S. reporters have developed a decidedly low opinion of politicians and that "bad news" has become the dominant tone of U.S. election coverage. We tested a possible "anticandidate" treatment of image bites across three packaging strategies (Table 6).

We first captured the content of image bites by distinguishing five types of facial displays that are loosely based on categories developed by Kepplinger (1987, 1999) and Bucy and Bradley (2004). We coded whether the candidate appeared agitated (operationalized as energetic, aggressive, activated, powerful), broadly positive (operationalized as smiling, laughing, optimistic, upbeat, hopeful, self-confident, certain of victory), neutral (operationalized as expressionless, self-controlled, calm), moderately negative (operationalized as uneasy, unsure, uncomfortable, anxious, tense, helpless, surprised), or even clearly negative (operationalized as a noticeably unfavorable or inappropriate depiction of demeanor). To measure "picture selection bias," we calculated the number of stories containing moderately negative and clearly negative image bites in all four countries' television news (see first row of Table 6). Contrary to our expectation, we found no evidence for a systematic bad-news tendency on U.S. news. Only the German RTL channel showed a modest preference for disadvantageous image bites, the bulk of which concerned Angela Merkel, who is known for her low telegenic appeal. She eventually won the 2005 election but by a much smaller margin than predicted in the polls. Although RTL's chief political correspondent is an admitted Merkel critic (Hofmann 2007), other studies found no support of a systematic anti-Merkel bias on RTL (Semetko and Boomgaarden 2007; Schulz and Zeh 2007).

The second anticandidate technique is "lip-flaps," a category taken from Grabe's (2007) innovative study. Grabe describes lip-flaps as a disrespectful editing technique in which a candidate is shown on screen in full frontal view (as a close-up or medium range shot) and moving his mouth because he is in formal speaking mode, usually addressing an audience or talking to the reporter. By

Table 6
Packaging of image bites (in percentages)

	United States 2004		Great Britain 2005		Germany 2005		France 2007		Cross-national Average
	ABC	NBC	BBC1 [#]	ITV1	ARD [#]	RTL	TF1	F2 [#]	
Anticandidate Editing I: Stories containing at least one "moderately" or "clearly" negative image bite of a candidate ("picture selection bias")	4	2	3	5	5	17	0	1	5
Anticandidate Editing II: Stories in which reporter talks at least once over a candidate although candidate is in formal speaking mode ("lip-flap")	14	19	16	12	7	14	8	7	12
Anticandidate Editing III: Stories whose concluding sound and image bite ("wrap-up") is granted to									
Candidate ^a	13	13	21	23	19	44	33	24	24
Journalist	66	64	44	41	42	21	21	22	40
Total of election stories (n)	120	94	141	171	59	36	103	135	

Note: N = 1,308 stories; # indicates public service broadcaster.

a. Wrap-ups by other news sources have been omitted for simplicity of presentation.

TV production standards, the nature of such visuals would "require" the reporter to also allow for the candidate's voice to be heard, but sometimes, reporters decide to remove the audio in postproduction and instead use their own voice-over. This behavior, although regarded as a rude or even patronizing journalistic interference, is an editing technique that has gained currency across many western democracies. As can be seen from the second row of Table 6, lip-flaps are most common among U.S. journalists, followed by their British and German colleagues; they are rare in France.

The third technique is concerned with who gets the beneficial last say, and last image, in an election story (Hallin 1992). Effects research suggests that the "wrap-up" at the end of a story is the most prominent position for the most powerful message because it is assumed to make the most lasting impression on the viewer. American journalists are by far the most likely to use this tool of journalistic domination, followed by the British and the Germans. Displaying the same country rank order as before, U.S. election coverage emerges as the most journalist-centered and the French coverage as the least. The fact that the

reporters of TF1 and France 2 used the smallest number of negative candidate images, lip-flaps, and journalist wrap-ups gives further credence to the idea of a more deferential reporting style, especially when compared to the sometimes more aggressive tone adopted in the other countries. In sum, the results provide only partial support for Hypothesis 6. But they do clearly confirm the by now familiar pattern that differences in news cultures are more fundamental on the national than on the organizational level.

Conclusions

The findings on sound bite and image bite news let us conclude that media-centered reporting styles are much more widespread across western media systems than often assumed. It surely is not a U.S.-specific phenomenon that is to be explained by U.S.-specific factors and experiences (e.g., Vietnam, Watergate, etc.).

Several of our results indicate the existence of a transnational news logic that likely is the result of a diffusion of journalistic standards and values. Evidence of transnational news culture emerged in the form of several uniform news practices. In all four countries, we established that (1) reporters' narration outweighs that of candidates by three to one in an average election story; (2) reporters dissect and compress candidates' statements more in tightly controlled than in less controlled campaigns; (3) reporters feature candidates equally often in voiceless image bites than in sound bites; (4) this preference for image bites is slightly more pronounced on commercial than public channels; (5) the difference in length of candidate sound bites has narrowed between U.S. and European news; and (6) reporters use anticandidate editing techniques—visual bias, lip flaps—only occasionally in a relatively small share of their stories.

With regard to the explanatory power of different newsroom cultures, this study comes to a sobering conclusion. By and large, reporting styles have grown remarkably similar; different ownership structures and program philosophies do hardly lead to distinctly dissimilar styles of sound bite news anymore. With few exceptions (amount of total election coverage, use of image bites), market-oriented and public interest-oriented newsrooms showed no substantial differences in election news discourse. A special and noteworthy case is German RTL, which displayed a swaggering disinterest in covering the elections; it also carried the most horse race-related sound bites and the most negative candidate image bites. RTL emerged here as prototypical representative of a market-oriented news organization that champions the ideas of consumerism, infotainment, and game fixation.

The most important, and perhaps surprising, finding of this study is the enduring importance of national news cultures in explaining sound bite news. This is best illustrated by the correspondence analysis in Figure 3. Correspondence

analysis is an inductive method used to reveal the structure of a complex data matrix and to represent it on a visual map—that is, as points within a space, thereby facilitating the interpretation of results (Clausen 1998).¹⁰ Our correspondence analysis is based on a contingency table cross-classifying the eight channels by their use of ten sound bite variables. Categories with similar distributions (i.e., channels with similar news practices) are represented as points that are close in space, and categories that have very dissimilar distributions are positioned furthest apart. The two-dimensional solution presented in Figure 3 explains 89 percent of the variance. The first dimension distinguishes between a “conflictive” and “cooperative” campaign communication style and the second between stronger “journalistic voice” and “political voice” in election stories. In the joint space between these dimensions, three nation-specific news cultures shine through. They are in close proximity and partly overlap, as suggested already by the various transnational parallels, but display characteristic contours nonetheless.

The U.S. news culture is a good illustration of Zaller’s (1998) theory of media politics, which predicts that high levels of news management at time point 1 lead to high levels of media negativity at time point 2. In the same vein, our findings indicate that the more U.S. candidates try to narrow journalists’ news choices, the more network reporters try to regain control over their own product by compressing candidates’ sound bites, focusing on their attack rhetoric, and using wrap-ups (and lip-flaps) more freely than their colleagues from other news backgrounds. Simply because U.S. journalists lack Q & A opportunities and are often compelled to report the messages and visuals served up to them, their approach to news making seems affected the most by an impulse to preserve their independence and to emphasize their skeptical, power-distant, and interventionist position.

The French news culture displays features of a less professionalized, less independently minded journalistic community. In many stories, the candidates, not the journalists, set the tone that indicates a more passive, sacerdotal, yielding reporting style. French election news, in general, is more structured by a political logic (and the candidates’ policy messages) than by an interventionist media logic (that would, at times, be less willing to recycle those messages). It is a journalism that fits the state-centered type of French democracy but may be regarded as inadequate by adherents of a different type of democracy.

The Anglo-German broadcast culture has sacerdotal elements, too, but they are balanced by a journalist-centered, interpretative approach. ARD, BBC1, and ITV1 all favor longer forms of news that offer candidates a platform for their ideas. But these ideas are confronted with the journalists’ own perspective—either in the form of daily commentaries on *ARD Tagesthemen* or in-studio policy analyses and performance evaluations on BBC1 and ITV1. By far, the toughest candidate interviews aired on the British channels; especially, the aggressive

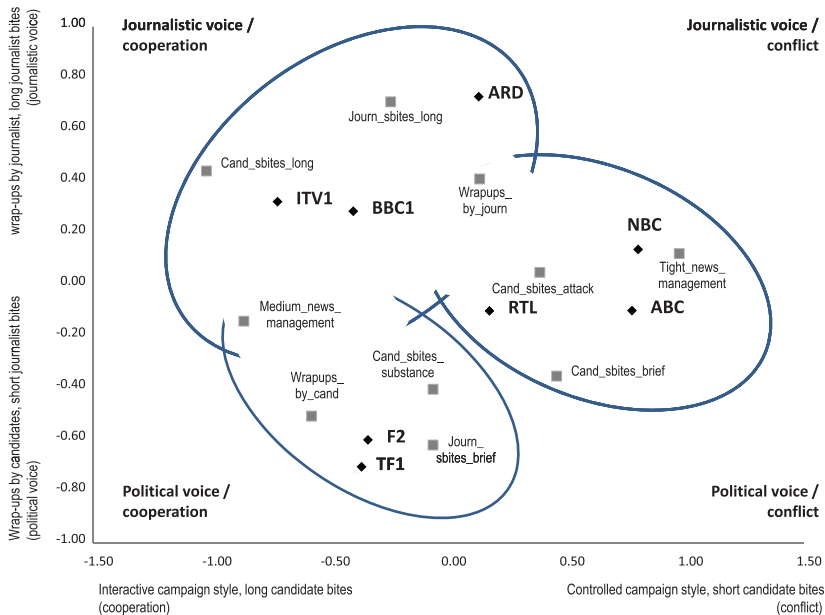


Figure 3

Mapping TV News Cultures (Correspondence Analysis)

Note: The *x*-axis explains 72 percent and the *y*-axis explains 17 percent of the variance. *Candidate sound bites long* and *journalist sound bites long* refer to uninterrupted statements longer than twenty-one seconds; *candidate sound bites brief* and *journalist sound bites brief* refer to those shorter than eleven seconds. *Candidate sound bites with attack* and *candidate sound bites with substance* are explained in Table 4. *Tight news management* or *medium news management* refers to the different campaign styles in Table 5. *Wrap-ups by candidate* and *wrap-ups by journalist* are explained in Table 6. Other variables had to be excluded from analysis because of insufficient variation or insufficient *n*-size; all calculations are based on 2004–2007 data.

questioning on ITV1 elicited a large share of defense rhetoric (Table 4). The extensive speaking time granted to candidates correlates with a more interactive campaign style of European candidates that imposes fewer restrictions on media access. But because the interpretative voice of the journalist is always clearly heard, we label the Anglo-German broadcast culture as moderately interventionist. An interesting qualification is that the German commercial channel RTL, owned by the transnational Bertelsmann conglomerate, falls out of this category because its news profile bears greater resemblance to the American approach. This is an important reminder of the permeability of national boundaries and the relativity of national news cultures' preeminence; certain border-transgressing influences filter easily through nation-specific

institutional barriers and affect journalistic practices in divergent organizations. Our “nation matters” conclusion can thus only be a tentative one.

The cultures identified here bear similarity to Patterson’s (2008) mapping of western journalists’ role positions and Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) typology of western news systems. Patterson’s study is based on survey responses, Hallin and Mancini’s on institutional features, and our own—much more modest undertaking—on actual news content. All three data sources have to be seen together, and ideally combined in one project, to investigate the fundamental assumption behind comparative political communication research. This assumption states that specific constellations of media and political structure (as manifested on the organizational, national, and transnational level) characteristically shape the facets of culture (as manifested in news journalists’ ideas, practices, and products, among other things).¹¹ With regard to sound bite news, our study was able to give a fairly specific assessment of the explanatory power of factors located on the different levels. While national contexts still matter the most, our evidence for the emergence of a transnational news culture is equally intriguing. The findings suggest that national news cultures (at least as manifested in sound and image bites) have aligned despite the fact that the political and media structures in the countries analyzed remain very different. This calls into question the assumption of a close correspondence between structure and culture. News cultures may be a more autonomous unit of analysis than previously thought; future research ought to address this question more systematically.

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Notes

1. For this content-based understanding of culture, see also McQuail (2005: 113, 307, 553).
2. Britain is characterized by Hallin and Mancini (2004) as a mixed case, with its print media falling into the liberal category and its broadcast media into the democratic-corporatist category.
3. I am indebted to colleagues at the University of Oklahoma, University of Missouri, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of Loughborough, Free University of Berlin, University of Mainz, and University of Zurich for infrastructure and assistance.
4. Whereas in the United States, for example, the general election phase lasts eight weeks, it lasts only four weeks in Great Britain. Whereas the French primary election is just two weeks before polling day (cutting the field of contenders from a dozen down to two), the

American primaries start nine to ten months before polling day. Whereas the British candidates put their campaigns on rest at weekends, the campaigns in the other countries continue without pause.

5. Both studies examined U.S. television news, but while we examined all election stories from two channels over four campaign weeks, Bucy and Grabe analyzed a random sample from three U.S. networks over eight campaign weeks. In addition, we used broader operational definitions for *election story* (by also coding campaign-related news items in which the main candidates did not appear personally) and for *sound bites* and *image bites* (by also coding their appearances in interviews).
6. When we exclude interview stories from our analysis, we come to almost the same sound bite means as reported in Farnsworth and Lichter (2007: 83).
7. After criticism for their lackluster campaign coverage in 2001, the sound bite length increased in 2005 for the first time since 1992—mainly as a result of ITV's inclusion of three lengthy interviews with the main party leaders in their bulletins.
8. Originally, Bucy and Grabe (2007) coded for the following content categories: speaking time devoted to policy positions, reactions to the news, attacks on opponents, defending one's role in a controversy, predicting victory, and rallying the troops. Drawing on their experience, we collapsed the first two into a general substance category called "issue discussions of policies and news events" and collapsed the last two into a general campaigning category called "statements about victory, support, strategy, momentum." As can be seen from Table 4, we kept "attack rhetoric" and "defense rhetoric" as well as an additional "other" category for cases that did not fit.
9. These results confirm a conclusion drawn before by Bucy and Grabe (2007).
10. The steps of correspondence analysis are as follows: category profiles (relative frequencies) and masses (marginal proportions) are computed, the distances between these points are calculated, and the best-fitting spaces of n dimensions are located. Rotation then occurs to maximize the inertia (variance) explained by each factor, as in principal components analysis.
11. In the words of Blumler and Gurevitch (1995: 74), the assumption states that "different features of the structures, norms, and values of political [and media] systems will differentially promote or constrain political communication roles and behaviors within those systems." See also Pfetsch (2004).

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